

From the Office of Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz

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For Immediate Release

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STATE TO TEST ELECTRONIC VOTING DURING MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS Towns can volunteer to participate

The Connecticut General Assembly recently approved a proposal by Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz to try out new electronic voting systems during municipal elections on November 4, 2003.

Mechanical lever voting machines have been used almost exclusively in the state for over 50 years, but the federal "Help America Vote Act" (HAVA), authored by Connecticut Senator Christopher Dodd and signed into law by President Bush, requires all states to update their voting systems by 2006. HAVA is a result of the voting debacle in Florida during the 2000 presidential election.

"Now is the time to explore new voting technologies as we work toward complying with federal law," Bysiewicz said. "In order to find the best voting system for our future, it is important to first determine which technology proves most reliable and find out what voters think of the various systems available."

The Election Day test of new voting systems will be done at no cost to taxpayers using equipment loaned free of charge by vendors. Bysiewicz plans to conduct the test in at least three towns of various populations, utilizing different technologies in each municipality that volunteers.

The new federal law specifically requires that voting systems provide persons with disabilities the opportunity to vote privately and independently.

"Electronic voting technology can help ensure that persons with disabilities are afforded equal opportunity to cast private, independent ballots," said Bysiewicz. "Between 200,000 to 300,000 of Connecticut's citizens with disabilities do not vote. Voter participation in the state could increase significantly through the use of new technology."

Federal funds will be available to help states pay for the purchase of voting systems that meet the new standards. "Connecticut must be prepared to seize the opportunity when the federal government makes funding available to the states," Bysiewicz said.